

U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (MO-08) today sent a letter to the Office of Management and Budget, the federal entity responsible for initiating an administration request for emergency funding to respond to natural disasters throughout the Midwest. Flooding is the focus of Emerson's letter, which is signed by every member of Congress who represents a congressional district along the lower Mississippi River.

"I think it is extremely important that we represent a united, bipartisan interest in the restoration of the system of flood protection our constituents depend on for protection. All of my colleagues in the lower Mississippi are focused on the places they represent, but we all realize we are in this together," Emerson said. "The first step in the process of getting an emergency supplemental appropriations bill is to have the commitment of the administration to tackle big funding issues, like the system of levees and floodwalls all along the Mississippi. This infrastructure protects millions of Americans and billions of dollars in economic activity."

Emerson expects the construction of emergency supplemental appropriations legislation will require a full assessment of the damage from flooding, but should gain bipartisan support similar to the positive response to a 2006 bill assembled after Hurricane Katrina.

"This effort will be the make-or-break legislation that help people over the long term. Without it, we face immense challenges in putting our lives back together and unacceptable threats to public safety," Emerson said.

The text of the congressional letter is attached. It was signed by U.S. Reps. Jo Ann Emerson (MO), Mike Ross (AR), Cedric Richmond (LA), Alan Nunnelee (MS), Gregg Harper (MS), Jerry Costello (IL), Bill Cassidy (LA), Ed Whitfield (KY), Stephen Fincher (TN), Steve Cohen (TN), Rick Crawford (AR), Bennie Thompson (MS), Rodney Alexander (LA), Jeff Landry (LA), and Steve Scalise (LA).

The Honorable Jacob J. Lew
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NWW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Lew,

As the Mississippi River system continues to experience record flooding, we request that the Administration include funding for continued flood protection in any supplemental appropriations request made of Congress.

As we write a "disaster in slow motion" is flowing down the Mississippi River. Flood gauges along the northern end of the river valley have already measured record crests in multiple locations and the southern end of the valley is experiencing similar emergency conditions. This sustained high water is testing the Mississippi River and Tributaries system, built and maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to its limits.

Counties bordering the Mississippi River and its tributaries in Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana have received Presidential Disaster declarations, and the Governor of Illinois has recently made a similar request. Already, the levee system has suffered as well from the record flooding. Many areas along the river and its tributaries have seen significant seepage and large sand boils which weaken the system. Flood walls have been strained with waters near their maximum designed capacity. And floodways and spillways have been operated, including the destruction of portions of the frontline levee at Birds Point, Missouri. Undoubtedly, as the flood continues to move down river this litany of weaknesses will continue to grow as well as the number of homes and lives impacted.

Our constituents deserve the level of flood protection authorized by law; and a supplemental appropriation will be necessary to provide this protection to them in a timely manner. Congress authorized the Mississippi River and Tributaries flood control program in response to the epic disaster brought about by the 1927 flood. The system has protected our constituents well for the past 84 years, and we are confident it will protect us during the "project flood" of 2011. However, this protection will come at a cost.

Restoring and rebuilding these strained and damaged flood protections is a priority for us, it is essential for our constituents, and we urge it be represented in any request the Administration makes for supplemental disaster response funds. Thank you for your consideration of this request.